

Los Alamos scientists school Wikipedia about women in science

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Recently, Los Alamos scientist Mitzi Boswell stumbled into a pervasive information gap on the Wikipedia reference website. Her niece had called, seeking the name of a woman scientist she could write about for a school assignment. It turns out few articles featured female scientists on Wikipedia, making it hard to find one if you didn't already have a name at hand.

Given the increasing public awareness of such research stars as Marie Curie (pioneering radiation researcher and two-time Nobel Prize winner) and Rosalind Franklin (chemist and X-ray crystallographer who enabled the understanding of DNA's structure), how could this fabulous resource be so lacking in content on female scientists? It's the same in the history books: Scores of female science stars have gone unnoticed for far too long. Boswell rallied the troops to take action.

First, Boswell told her niece about physicist Maria Goeppert Mayer, a woman who had direct ties to both the historic Project Y, which brought the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb at Los Alamos, and Los Alamos National Laboratory itself. That solved her niece's problem, but Boswell wanted to do more for the younger generation looking to "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit" for rich and reliable information.

So, on June 17, at the lab's first Wikipedia edit-a-thon, a group of lab employees gathered to create or edit biographies of Los Alamos female scientists on Wikipedia. Many of the employees were stepping into the Wikipedia "sandbox" for the first time. A sandbox is a personal space to work on potential Wikipedia contributions.

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